

Tools

TOOLS FOR GENERAL CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Good tools are not always the most expensive tools for sale. But if the tool you select is expensive, treat it as an investment. A few high-quality tools will serve you better than many poorly-made specialty tools.

Always choose tools that match your height and build. Before purchasing a tool, pick up several different versions of it, pretend to dig or rake, and make certain the tool you select is comfortable for you to use. Special tools designed for left handers and people with arthritis or other disabilities are available as well.

Good maintenance of your tools is as important as your initial selection. Stainless steel tools are more expensive than carbon steel tools but are easier to maintain. A bucket of sand saturated with a quart of motor oil is good for cleaning your tools and keeping them from rusting. Oil all the movable metal parts of your tools and sharpen the blades. Remove sap from pruners with steel wool and oil.

Garden fork A pitchfork or garden fork is

a useful tool for working heavy soil, lifting root vegetables, dividing perennials, and turning over the compost pile. Invest in a good quality steel or stainless steel fork with four well-spaced, rounded, or angled prongs. A flat-pronged fork may also be useful for lifting root crops.

Garden rake This metal flat-headed tool is useful in removing debris, breaking up and leveling soil and gravel, and preparing seedbeds.

Gloves A pair of heavy gloves is essential for protecting your hands when pruning.

Hand cultivator A hand cultivator's three or five tines are curved and claw-like, differing from a flat-tined hand fork. A claw-like tool is good for loosening the soil and for weeding. It is less precise than a trowel but is often faster to use.

Hand fork A hand fork is to a garden fork what a trowel is to a shovel. It is good for loosening soil in tight spaces and lifting small plants. You can also use it to cultivate between rows of crops.

Hand pruners Maintaining your landscape requires hand pruners. Use these

to trim shrubs, roses, berry canes, and twigs and branches that are no larger than 1/2 inch in diameter. Hand pruners come in two styles: one has a blade that cuts against a flat surface; the other operates more like a pair of scissors. Choose pruners that have replaceable parts, blades that can be sharpened easily, and a safety latch to keep the pruners closed when not in use.

Hoe Two types of hoes are useful in the garden. A draw hoe with a long handle and a 4 to 6 inch blade is good for surface weeding, aerating, and hilling up soil. A narrower hoe, or onion hoe, has a 3 inch blade and is good for cultivating between rows.

Irrigation equipment The equipment required depends upon the scale of planting. A one- or two-gallon watering can is sufficient for a small plot, but large areas need a hose. Soil soakers can be laid between the plants to conserve water and minimize water loss to evaporation. More elaborate irrigation systems can be installed by a contractor.

Lawn mowers Reel mowers are good when you want to maintain a dense, short

turf. A reel makes a clean, even cut and is preferred for warm-season turfgrasses such as bermudagrass and zoysiagrass. It is also the most environmentally friendly choice. If you mow with a reel, you must mow frequently. A reel mower cannot effectively mow grass shoots or weeds that are higher than the horizontal centerline of the reel. Reel mowers come in various sizes from a push mower to a large tractor-pulled mower.

A sickle bar mower is good for higher cutting heights where you only plan to cut the turf one to four times a year. It is usually mounted on a tractor and used for large areas such as pastures and common areas.

A rotary lawn mower is the most common backyard lawn mower. Many are gas powered, but you can also purchase electric-operated machines. The rotary machine cuts the grass with a horizontal impact of the blade. This can cause a certain amount of injury to the leaf blade and is not adapted to putting green quality mowing — very short and very dense. The rotary mower can be used for cutting taller grass and weeds and to mulch fallen tree leaves. Be careful because it is easy to scalp an uneven ground surface. The blade needs to be balanced at all times. Look for a well-constructed and well-protected machine. The rotary blade action can eject stones and metals as easily as grass blades.

The mulching mower is a variation of the rotary lawn mower. This mower cuts grass clippings into very small pieces assisting the

natural decomposition of the clippings and adding needed nitrogen to the soil. Cut frequently. Removing less of the grass blades at each cut will speed the decomposition process.

Lawn (Leaf) rake This tool is indispensable and is made of plastic, metal, or bamboo. Select a metal rake for raking twigs and debris. Select a bamboo rake to reduce potential damage to the lawn.

Long-arm pruners This is a useful tool if you don't want to climb a ladder. One type has a 6- to 10-foot-long metal pole with a blade attached by a wire to a lever. This blade cuts with a slicing action, moving upwards against a fixed hook-shaped blade. Another type is basically a pair of shears on the end of a rod.

Loppers These are long-handled, heavy-duty pruners. They are useful for pruning bushes, thinning trees, and clipping thorny plants. They are about 18 inches long and will cut branches up to about 1 1/2 inches in diameter.

Pruning saws These are used for cutting branches over 1 inch thick. The teeth are widely spaced to keep them from clogging with wet sawdust. There are three basic types: a straight-bladed saw good for light pruning; a curved saw that works well in awkwardly placed branches; and a bow saw most often used for heavy work.

Shovel A round-pointed shovel is the basic garden tool. It is good for digging and

mixing soil, compost, and fertilizer.

Spade A spade is a straight-sided square shovel that easily cuts through sod and is ideal for edging and transplanting.

Sprayers These are useful for applying pesticides. There are different kinds of sprayer containers. The simplest is a hand pump. To gain and maintain pressure, you must pump the sprayer periodically. This type of sprayer can also be pumped mechanically. Another type of sprayer is pressurized and does not require periodic pumping. Sprayers should be strong, light, and able to take different nozzles. If you intend to spray more than an acre at one time, you may need a motorized sprayer. Wash out your sprayer after use, following the instructions in [Controlling Pests](#) starting on page 49. You should use separate sprayers for insecticides and herbicides.

Spreaders A spreader is used for evenly distributing fertilizer and lime. Drop-type or rotary spreaders are the most effective; however they are more difficult to maneuver around trees and shrubs. Rotary spreaders usually give better distribution because they spread over a large area.

Stringtrimmer (Weed Eater) This is either electric or gasoline powered. It is a useful and time-saving tool if you have areas which cannot be mowed with a lawn mower. Use with care to avoid tearing tree bark or damaging painted surfaces.

Trowel A good trowel is indispensable for everyday gardening chores. It is a small hand-held tool. It has a medium-width